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ABSTRACT

This article describes a paired storytelling technique that can be used in bilingual and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classrooms to help motivate students to maximize reading comprehension. The technique involves having the students: (1) pair off; (2) discuss the story theme; (3) read half of the story; (4) take notes on their half of the story; (5) exchange the story notes with each other; (6) write about the part of the story they have not read, based on their partner's notes; (7) read their own versions of the story to each other; (8) read the part of the story they have not read; (9) discuss the whole story; and (10) take a test on the story. This storytelling strategy provides opportunities for one-on-one interaction among students around school tasks and gives them opportunity to use the target language communicatively. The cooperative work improves group relations, increases self-esteem, and increases vocabulary acquisition. (MDM)

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Anita Lie

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Paired Storytelling: An Integrated Approach for Bilingual and English as a Second Language Students

by Anita Lie

The immediate goal of bilingual/ESL reading teachers is to motivate students to maximize comprehension by providing or activating the appropriate cultural schemata. It is imperative that students master the right strategies and techniques and learn how effective readers are actively engaged in the reading process by utilizing their prior knowledge to make sense of the text (Smith, 1982; Anderson et al., 1980; and Goodman, 1986). As one of the strategies, Paired Storytelling encourages bilingual/ESL students to be actively engaged in the reading process. Through the activities, students use their prior knowledge and develop their imagination.

The Paired Storytelling approach includes five characteristics important in teaching students to read in a second language: first, that the students' cultural background plays an important role in reading comprehension (Gollnick and Chinn, 1990); second, that L2 (second language) readers should use the same sorts of skills as effective L1 (first language) readers do (Krashen, 1982); third, that reading should be integrated with writing (Tierney and Shanahan, 1991); fourth, that students should be engaged in nonthreatening cooperative contexts (Slavin, 1983); and fifth, they should have opportunity to process information effectively and communicate in the target language (Krashen, 1982).

Paired Storytelling uses reading and writing together and cooperative learning to help ESL/bilingual students become more effective readers and communicators. The following instructional activities have been used successfully in a foreign/second language setting.

1. The teacher pairs two students.

2. Before handing out the text, the teacher provides a general introduction to the topic, beginning, "Today we are going to read about...." The teacher can also write the topic on the board and ask the students what they know about that topic and how it relates to their experiences. If necessary, the teacher may give this introduction in the students' first language and the students may be allowed to use their first language. This brainstorming activity is intended to activate the students' prior knowledge, helping them build an anticipatory model that will be confirmed or modified as they encounter the actual text. The teacher should emphasize that making the right guess is not the point. Instead, what is important is to get ready for the story. In the bilingual/ESL reading classroom, the teacher must be particularly sensitive to reading problems that may happen if the reader cannot access the appropriate existing schemata, or if the reader does not have the appropriate schemata necessary to understand a text (Smith, 1982; Anderson et al., 1980; and Goodman, 1986). In the brainstorming activity, the teacher will learn whether the students have the appropriate cultural background knowledge or not. In many cases, a text requires considerable background teaching before it makes any sense. If necessary, the teacher can provide the students with some background information to prepare them for the text.

3. The text/story is divided into

two sections. The first half of the story is given to one student in each pair and the second half to the other one.

4. As each student is reading his/her own section, he/she is to jot down the key concepts. The teacher should probably limit the number of key words or phrases depending on the length or complexity of the text. Each student is to list the key words/phrases in the order in which they appear in the text.
5. Then both students in the pair exchange their lists. The teacher gives them a few moments to reflect on the list of clues and relate them to the story part they have read. Occasionally, one or a few students may not understand a certain word. Either the teacher or the student who wrote the word may explain its meaning in English either by giving its definition or by using it in a sentence.
6. By recalling the part he/she has read and using the clues that the other student has recorded, each student then develops and writes his/her own version of the story's missing part. The student who has read the first half tries to predict what will happen next and continues to develop the story. On the other hand, the one who has read the latter part guesses what has happened before (see Figures 1 and 2 for samples of a pair's story versions).
7. When they have finished, they should read their own versions to each other. Occasionally, the teacher may want to call a few volunteers to read their stories aloud to the class. It

should be stressed that no one may laugh at or make any denigrating comment about somebody else's story.

8. Next, the teacher distributes the missing part of the story to everybody in class and asks them to read and compare it with their own stories.
9. The session should conclude with a discussion of the whole story. This may be done in each pair or with the whole class. If many students in the class are rather inhibited to speak up, doing it in pairs may encourage them to communicate with their partners and use the target language. In some instances, they may also be allowed to use their home language in this discussion session. Moll and Diaz (1987) studied a bilingual program which attempted to promote students' academic development in both Spanish and English. The students showed that they had understood much more about the story than they had been able to express in English.
10. The teacher may sometimes give a quiz at the end of the session. Each student does the quiz individually.

The Benefits of Paired Storytelling

This strategy provides opportunities for one-to-one interaction among students around school tasks and gives them opportunity to use the target language communicatively. The cooperative work improves group relations and increases self-esteem, which particularly benefits non-native speakers of English who are rather inhibited about speaking in the target language in a larger group. The cooperative atmosphere of working in the pair may greatly motivate students and give them confidence to use the target language. This oral use of the target language may in turn improve their reading performance as the development of reading and writing is closely related to

the acquisition of the oral language.

Another important benefit is vocabulary work. Virtually all texts in ESL deal with vocabulary items, but often the rationale for choosing the words to be glossed seems arbitrary. It is hard to know whether the words are selected because they are difficult or because they are useful. Many reading textbooks present lists of words in isolation or with definitions, but without any real language context. Furthermore, in many books, the glossary part is often followed by an unrealistic and meaningless task ("Make a sentence with the word semi-barbaric"). Words are vehicles of meanings and as such rarely occur in isolation. There is no doubt that vocabulary is best learned when the target words are learned in context, as there is a link between vocabulary and schemata. Paired Storytelling provides the opportunity to work on vocabulary in the meaningful context of the whole text. Each student must give a special attention to important (key) words and phrases in relation to the whole context and list them as clues for his/her partner. Everybody will then have the chance to use the key vocabulary actively in sentences, again with the help of the context (of the other half of the story).

As students read and hear each other's story versions, it becomes clear that reading is a highly interactive process between individuals and their prior background knowledge, on the one hand, and the text itself, on the other hand.

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- Share your own reading experiences
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- Be active in your local reading council
- Form a 'Teachers as Readers' group in your school district.
- Fight censorship in your community
- Become a literacy volunteer
- Share the gifts of reading each day!